



Anaïs Nin (1903-1977)

Nothing But Light — Notes on Henry Miller's Birthday Gift for Anaïs Nin & The Tranquility of Struggle

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Pour mes amis, Rémy Deshayes, Susan Davey, Pierre Marsault &
Doris Dietrich, et en souvenir de Dan Bloxam & Deucey Jones.

"The great writer is the very symbol of life, the non-perfect."
— Henry Miller

On Tuesday February 21st 1939, Anaïs Nin's thirty-sixth birthday, Henry Miller took a small notebook, opened it and wrote, in ink, at a 45 degree angle, sloping left to right, the title "The Heaven Beyond Heaven."¹ He underlined the words three times with wavy lines, echoing the ancient symbol of Aquarius, the water bearer.² This was the beginning of Henry's birthday gift to Anaïs — a small handwritten book, which was one of a series that he wrote between 1937 and 1940, in printer's dummies obtained from Jack Kahane, for his close friends.³

Henry Miller was in the midst of an obsession with Honoré de Balzac's *Séraphita* and *Louis Lambert*, encouraged by Conrad Moricand. This led to the essays "Séraphita" and "Balzac & His Double," later published in *The Wisdom of the Heart* (New Directions 1941).

The text for Anaïs was dedicated to:

...all the Séraphitas who fail to find their Shangri-la here on earth.⁴

The Heaven Beyond Heaven is a work impregnated with a religious spirit — and the love affair with language that had begun, for both Anaïs (who began to write to bring about a *rapprochement* with her lost father) and Henry, in their youth. The title was inspired by a remark by Theosophist David Edgar, who once told Miller: "You used to be all for the earth and now you're all for heaven."⁵ For some months, with *Tropic of Capricorn* completed (except for proofing) and the surety that he would be leaving France to travel to

Greece, and then probably to America,⁶ this was a time of farewells for Miller and a moment to reassess his life and writing. Miller had, for many months, been deeply immersed in astrology (thanks to Moricand and Eduardo Sanchez),⁷ in Theosophy (with Edgar) and an attempt to formulate a theoretical justification (or defense) of his writing, now that he knew that he would most likely be thrown back into an American literary community that he felt could barely conceive of his intentions in his books.⁸ This fear of misunderstanding led to "Reflections on Writing" (written in Greece for Huntington Cairns 1939, published in *The Wisdom of the Heart* New Directions 1941) and later *The World of Sex* (written for Ben Abramson 1940, published by Abramson 1941), which parallel the essays written by D.H. Lawrence against censorship and a pornographic interpretation of his work, collected in *Sex, Literature & Censorship*.⁹ Anaïs, in turn, wrote about her revolutionary conception of writing in *Realism & Reality* (Alicat, 1946), *On Writing, The Writer & the Symbols* (both published in *The Mystic of Sex*, Capra 1995) and *The Novel of the Future* (Swallow Press, 1968).

From the earliest days of their relationship, Miller and Nin had engaged in dialogues about writing (theirs and others'), critiqued each other's work, tried to help edit publishable manuscripts and find outlets for their prose. In the beginning, when both were unknown and had at best tenuous connections to publishers, they readily allowed each other to suggest wholesale changes to already completed, but unpublished, books. Miller accepted that Anaïs look at his drafts of (and notes for) *Moloch* and later *Tropic of Cancer* and make suggestions. They compared notes for their accounts of June Mansfield. Miller used Anaïs' writing as the basis of his *Scenario*. Over several years, Henry tried to help Anaïs refine her written English.

On February 12th 1932, Nin wrote to Miller (whom she had only known since the previous November 28th) that she was sure she knew what needed "weeding out" of *Moloch* and offered to "chisel it out" for him. Anaïs had in turn been working on a novel about her relationship with John Erskine, which Miller commented on and she later abandoned. Henry also suggested deletions from her book on D. H. Lawrence, which she approved. Anaïs believed that she and Henry were equals and should do everything to help each other perfect their art. Both were impassioned by the fact they finally had

someone who took their writing seriously and who could relate to what they were trying to achieve. Ever practical (about everything except money), Anaïs had even sent Henry an American typewriter to Dijon, during his brief stay there, since he was usually unable to write anything but letters by hand.¹⁰

On February 13th 1932, already foreseeing the difficulty of being appreciated by conventional audiences, Anaïs wrote to Henry that she might "someday, like Lawrence, turn around and write my own explanations of my books." For an author whose first published book, on Lawrence, only appeared in 1932, the comment could have sounded either prescient or presumptuous.¹¹

In March 1932, everything changed between them. Miller and Nin became lovers. The nature of their complicity deepened. They began to see sides of each other that had been unimagined. Their life, since meeting, had been steeped in literature and discussions of their own lives and relationship with June Mansfield. They deliberately drew parallels between their own experience and both great writers and their art (June/Albertine, Henry/Dostoevsky/Proust/Lawrence, Anaïs/Mélanide/Lady Chatterley/Madame Bovary, etc.)

The Heaven Beyond Heaven begins with "In the beginning was the Word."¹² The "Word" establishes an identification between God and the writer. Both are creators of their own worlds. The religious dimension of the craft of writing is repeatedly asserted in Miller's books, most notably in his modern-day Bible, *Tropic of Cancer* and in *The World of Sex*, which Durrell saw as having a biblical parallel (*Ecclesiastes*). Miller believed that art and writing were only necessary to people who had lost the deepest connection between themselves and the divine. Hence the...

...word is always a reminder of a more perfect state, of a union or unity which is ineffable and indescribable.

It is the cruel separation of mankind and the divine that makes the artist inevitable. Creation is an attempt "to recover what is lost." This idea speaks to the heart of Anaïs Nin's obsession with

writing (to recover her lost father and create a world she can inhabit) and with keeping a diary that will be not a factual account of what happened or what she felt at any particular time, but rather which was frequently rewritten and existed in varied forms at different times depending on the intended audience, her state of mind and psychological need.¹³ Writing, for Miller, proceeded from a sense of loneliness and abandonment — his feeling of having been savagely torn from his first childhood paradise, when his family moved to “The Street of Early Sorrows.” Miller wrote because he had lost the sense of connection and communion between himself and the world he had loved as a child — because he felt a chasm had opened up between himself and those he believed he loved and who had allegedly abandoned him (his parents, June, Cora Seward etc.).

Miller saw Nin’s writing as an atlas¹⁴ in which she had charted the “metamorphoses of your unions and separations.” Such writing laid down “the Ark of the Covenant of the lost.” Echoing an image first used by Louis-Ferdinand Céline (and once used for June), Henry likened Anaïs to the Lawrence of *Last Poems*, building a ship of death, but with her own image carved on the prow. The *Diary* was also like a compass. Her destination was not fixed. It would change, along an elliptical course, as the stars and planets change position in the heavens.¹⁵ The journey would not be one of shifting latitude and longitude (spiritually, as in *Cancer* and *Capricorn*), but rather of climate (Fraenkel’s “Weather Paper”). In her diary, Anaïs would log the movements of the compass as the ship of her soul was jolted by the currents of life.

Henry believed that Anaïs’ handwriting and signature would never really change, because she was writing down a record of “the constancy of change, the eternality of metamorphoses.” Her diary and novels were a record of the constant transformation of both her emotions and character and the shifting paradigm of her truth. Her diary portrait of Miller, during the 1930s, is given its instability by her inability and unwillingness to fix Henry or define him in the absolute. To do so would be to risk losing him definitively. Separation felt like death. He, like her feelings for him, is in constant flux, contradictory and locatable in emotional space and time only by triangulation networks of enormous complexity. The Henry Miller she knew was not the Miller Betty Ryan, Michael

Fraenkel, or Blaise Cendrars knew, nor was the Anaïs Henry knew the person known to Gonzalo Moré, Otto Rank, or Rupert Pole.

Henry Miller saw Anaïs Nin as a woman “constantly striving to fill the empty vessel of life.” She symbolically enacted the character of her Aquarian nature, much as she sought to deny it. Henry knew, as she herself admitted in her diary, that she sought constantly to give and to fulfill the needs of others, often to her own distress, detriment and pain. Miller had, in his youth, ventured to do the same thing while working at Western Union, out of a profound sense of compassion. It almost destroyed him. Her need to give and encourage left Anaïs often profoundly unhappy, materially depleted and repeatedly risking the wrath of her husband. Miller identified Anaïs with Christ at the Sermon on the Mount, attempting to feed the unquenchable “hunger” (needs) of all she met. Anaïs was no Christ. She was inevitably defeated. The same can, at times, be said of Miller — for example, in his ultimately disastrous relationship with Conrad Moricand recounted in *A Devil in Paradise*.

Miller, in 1939, knew that another World War was inevitable. The old forms of society and expression in the arts were no longer sufficient. A massive phase of destruction would be necessary before there could be renewal. The Spenglerian vision evinced in *Tropic of Cancer* is still at the heart of his conception of the moment. His gaze, however, is firmly fixed on the future. Having finished *Capricorn*, he is no longer obsessed with the past, as he had been for most of his writing life. Even Paris and the French, who, some might argue, saved him from himself and offered him enormous opportunities to fulfill his potential, were now (temporarily) consigned to the past — hence dead and unimportant.¹⁶ Anaïs, Henry wrote to Huntington Cairns, on April 30th 1939, was the real reason behind his salvation and achievement.¹⁷

Miller believed that a great change was about to come about. He linked this to the changes in the zodiac, and believed it was destined to lead them both into a “richer mode of life.” He wrote that Anaïs’ ship of dreams must leave the waters of familiar experience and take flight. He used the Biblical imagery of the Old Testament Flood and the dove settling upon Mount Ararat. Miller sees a parallel between the world of his day and the world of extreme

violence and corruption that caused God to destroy the “Mosaic” world by flood. At the core of life, Miller placed faith. At its culmination is a state of pure being and oneness with the divine. Miller saw life and the world as being in a state of constant flux; hence, his love for everything that flows (including Anaïs and his own words). Miller’s fascination with astrology was linked to his writing style — both anchored in symbolism. As he had told Anaïs, and she recorded in the *Diary*, August 24th 1938:

For me, Cancer means the crab, as it was known to Chinese sages — the creature which could move in any direction. It is the sign of the zodiac for the poet — the halfway station in the round of realization, when one comes to the constellation Libra. Opposite Cancer in the zodiac (extremes of the equinox, turning points) is Capricorn, the house in which I am born, which is religious and represents the renaissance in death. Cancer also meant for me the disease of civilization, the extreme point of realization along the wrong path — hence the necessity to change one’s course and begin all over again. Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence, also, in a more profound way, the essence of Buddhism: Cancer, then, is the apogee of death in life, as Capricorn is of life in death. The two symbols are found in geography as Tropics (which is another word for hieroglyphs)...I, as I have said frequently in my books, am trying to walk the hairline that separates the two. The line is only imaginary. There is no boundary line to reality.¹⁸

Miller was now involved in an effort to gain a “total grasp of life,” which involved a journey into the unknown. He saw that the earth might one day become “pure light.” Like Balzac, in *Séraphita*, he believed that creation was a form of transformation that would eventually give way to a state of pure being.

Alluding to Christ, he wrote:

The Word was never meant to be engraved on tablets of stone nor imprisoned between the covers of a book. The word is the light and the truth become flesh.

Henry claimed that he no longer sought fame and immortality through his books. He realized that this desire was evidence of the death-urge, just as he had intuited when adhering to Fraenkel and Lowenfels' *Anonymous* manifesto, before succumbing to vanity and a desire for recognition and security.

Writing is life, but what is written is death precisely because it seeks to preserve what cannot be preserved through form and substance.

There is a profound awareness that writing is a pathetic substitute for pure being and often hopelessly inadequate to express the deepest emotions and feelings of the writer. Miller, who once fell in love with Proust's notion of the cathedral-book, and sought to create his own Hindu-Buddhist temple in *Cancer*, now saw his past writings as the building blocks of a sarcophagus, a monument to the ever-changing ego:

...we are only building tombs for posterity to admire with our words.

The ideal would be to put down the brush and pen and simply live life to the full. One has to develop an awareness of one's powers and capacities and not force the issue — in writing, as in life. Henry believed that Anaïs forced her writing. She tried for something beyond her capacities. Consequently, there was a false ring. Concentration and meditation, even abstaining from writing and centering oneself in the heart of one's own true experience, vision and being, would lead to fluency in writing and the most apt form of personal expression — just as when Henry had first tried to imitate Hamsun, Faure, Mann, and others and failed and only succeeded when he ceased to relate himself so closely to tradition and opened his heart to his own unique voice in *Cancer*.

Miller saw Balzac as being stymied by his own ego. He could not sustain the finest writing because he was constantly "prostituting his gifts for material ends" and, obsessed with power, money and fame, was unable to enjoy or hold onto what he had, either in terms of his greatest literary gifts, materially or spiritually. Miller had made a similar mistake by seeking fame and fortune and trying to make the world accept him on his own terms. He was

ahead of his time and therefore received bans and incomprehension, as well as praise for all the wrong reasons, instead. The real key to fulfillment and happiness should have been adapting to his own self. With the completion of *Capricorn*, Miller was sure that he had written his best work so far; something far beyond *Cancer*. He had, he believed, reached a point beyond morality and notions of good and evil. The leitmotif of his new found state was acceptance.

Henry knew that people are often afraid of being judged. He had long been so, but had come to realize that Anaïs, above all others, knew his faults and sins and had loved him anyway — accepting him as he was. The cause of deep wounds within the hearts of men and women was the inability to accept the deeper reality of life and of others. For example, Anaïs could not accept the reality of her father's actions or her own neuroses, just as Henry, for years, could not accept the reality of his own character, nor Hugh Guiler the reality of his wife's personality and deceit.

Miller could not allow that Anaïs was right when she blamed her lack of success as a writer on her lack of fluency in any one language. He knew that writing was a craft that had to be honed by constant practice and increasing respect for honesty to one's deepest self. Part of her failure would always be her need to lie to herself and her readers about her motivations and actions and those of others. Miller never sought to give a fair or balanced view of his life. His "written reality" was always subjective. It was never intended to be factual, as was implied by Anaïs keeping a journal. His truth remained personal and symbolic.¹⁹ He believed that one must suffer from a form of insanity to lie in a diary, as Anaïs often did.²⁰

Miller linked the ability to read with close attention to the ability to write well. It was the fascination with language, amply illustrated by Miller's own obsession with words and dictionaries and the music behind language that he believed allowed him to penetrate deeper mysteries and write better. He believed that Anaïs was thwarted in expression by her eagerness to "unload" and desperation to be acknowledged as a writer, to justify her lifestyle and to be loved and accepted by everyone, from those who were close to her to strangers, readers and critics. Henry could not accept that someone who had been writing daily for some twenty-six years could not express what she truly felt if she wished to.

He told her directly:

You want your faults to be overlooked or condoned — you are not yet willing to make the effort to eradicate them.

If she would not admit that then the only course open would be to:

...waste your energies defending what cannot be defended or retreating into secrecy and solitude to nourish imaginary grievances against the over-critical.

Miller knew that when writers made a book available to the public they could not, as he believed Nin sought to do — justifiably considering the tone of *The Novel of the Future* — “hand out a new moral code involving sympathy and discernment.” It is always necessary to accept that many readers would not understand one’s work and let it go — not fight to convince everyone, or try to alter the parameters of critical discussion. Miller wrote to Anaïs disparagingly of her “Hispano-Sinza style,” which he likened to the Hindu sagas. He asserted that one could only import these tonalities of language into English if one could convince that English was already lacking the necessary “quarter-tones of meaning and expression.”²¹ This criticism was crucial to Miller’s interpretation of her writing, since he had himself, successfully he believed, imported Buddhist and Hindu elements into his own novels, unperceived by most readers. It was their invisibility, as in the work of Whitman and Emerson, that revealed their success.

Miller believed that Anaïs had ultimately been the cause of her own grief and suffering because of her unwillingness to accept the reality of the abandonment by her father. Although Anaïs claimed to represent Reality and to abhor Realism, the inability to accept any reality other than her own was the cause of her martyrdom. Paradoxically, it was at the heart of her need to write and the lynchpin of her most extensive creation — her *Diary*.

Miller believed that Reality was:

...not cruel and oppressive, but a balm, like the earth itself...It is from the earth we spring and to earth we return, why should it not be healing to our wounds? It is the same with Reality...It is only the effort to conceal, to shut out the totality, which hurts and wounds, ourselves and the other.

For writers as profoundly indebted to memory, for material, as Henry and Anaïs were, Miller saw it as essential to find the proper role for the cultivation and use of images from the past. Miller spoke about “freeing oneself from the chains of memory.” This seems in direct contradiction to so much of his work. “Chains” was the pertinent word. He saw a distinction between the “hothouse cultivation of memory and the powers of memory acquired by the sage.” Trying to preserve memory as an intellectual pursuit or as a neurotic reaction was, as Proust had pointed out, “throttling.” It looked only backwards. It was an attempt to resist the inevitable, natural, cyclical, processes of the life force. The cultivation of the powers of seeing into the past or future through involuntary memory, as in Proust, is both liberating and fecundating.²² The experiences would be preserved in their essence and their true meaning revealed without distortion caused by the will and intellect. Miller believed that we had lost the visionary component that allowed us to see both past and future clearly, out of a sense of terror of the truths it could force us to face. We like to convince ourselves that we are living in the present and that the future is ours for the taking.

Miller agreed with the Rosicrucians that life had three stages — *Purgative*, *Illuminative* and *Unitive*. He saw that Anaïs needed to free herself from her constant need to balance her life and maintain equilibrium and “truth,” as represented by Libra. To Henry, it was implied, this sign signifies the culmination of the destructive (for the soul and for the artist) intellectual and social constructs of Man — Law, Harmony, Balance, Logic, and Reason. He noted that the word “deliverance” came from the notion of escaping from the constructs of Libra. The traits associated with this sign formed both a prison and an *impasse*. It is the interaction with the world of the pagan and his deepest instincts and desires that allows man to become free of the stultifying and crippling impact of organized religion, the Judeo-Christian tradition and pervasive influence of Greek philosophy.

Late at night on Saturday September 9th 1939, a week after the war began, Henry Miller again took up his book for Anaïs in the “dead silence” of the small Greek fishing village of Kalamí, on Corfu.



Henry Miller with Lawrence Durrell, Corfu, 1939

He was seated on a hill overlooking the cove, surrounded by olive trees. He was the guest of Larry Durrell, who had built his "white house" on a promontory by Cavo Kefali, just moments from the sea.²³ The experience of Greece had already impacted Miller profoundly. He never expected to be continuing her book in such a place. Henry had a deep sense of peace and a certainty that all would be well. He had been in Athens, but soon turned his back on the opportunities of the literary scene to return alone to the peace and tranquility of the village. He did not know why, but he felt the need of solitude and wondered if it were a kind of learning experience for a greater solitude yet to come. Henry felt "rich." The ability to write letters was enough to assuage any feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Henry tried to offer Anaïs encouragement about her recently published book *The Winter of Artifice* (Obelisk Press 1939, reprint Sky Blue Press 2007). He knew that she had always thought of solitude, as in her early days at Louveciennes, as a kind of imprisonment. Perhaps she would feel differently now. He spoke (over-generously) of the positive reaction to her book, particularly among women:

...rich and varied — but above all, true, precise, definite, penetrating. And unique!

Miller hoped that maybe *The Winter of Artifice* would be translated into Greek, just as *Cancer* had, the year before, appeared in Czech.²⁴ Henry had begun to learn Greek, which was then beset by the argument over whether to use *Dimotiki* or *Katharevousa* forms of the language. Katsimbali and Miller's other friends supported the use of Demotic Greek, which was closest to life itself. It was this form which Miller learned.²⁵ He was in love with the "nudity and simplicity of the landscape." He saw uniqueness and individuality in everything, from the rocks and olive trees to the people themselves. Here, "no two men think alike." Greece had an eternal feel about it — a quality of existing outside of time (whereas, in America "the cancer of time is eating us away").²⁶ He saw Greece as the meeting point between Occident and Orient and, in his imagination, was reminded of Spain, which (perhaps missing Anaïs) he again longed to see.²⁷ He saw the Greeks as opposite to the French, in that they liked to say "yes" and hated to say "I don't know." Their historic

present, in everyday language, gave rise to manifold fabulations and enormous verbal creativity, roundabout stories and vivid anecdotes, new mythologies. He saw the Greeks as a people who found factual truth dull. They preferred to create legends, as he would around Katsimbali in *Colossus of Maroussi*. There is a close parallel to his later work in *The Rosy Crucifixion*.

By now, Henry Miller was:

...so far from France in heart and soul, that it seems almost as if the ten years I spent there were lived on another planet or in another incarnation.

He felt no tenderness for France and "indifferent towards the French." He had no wish to return.

Miller had always been a man of the cities. It was as though, here in Greece, he were discovering nature for the first time. Although fascinated by astrology, his interest had previously been theoretical. The time in Kalami taught him that "certain stars cast a strong beam of light on the water when they are rising." He had, one evening when studying the sky at length, come to the realization that there was a greater light beyond that which we perceived: a sun beyond the Sun — just as there is a "Heaven Beyond Heaven." This led him to conclude that the universe is all Light and that there is, in reality, no opposition of light and dark. Everything is one. The "void" of space is not emptiness, but its opposite.

The whole architectonics of the universe is governed by desire, which achieves its aim by realizing its containedness.

In Greece, the sun beat down unrelentingly. Miller took walks in the olive groves and sat in the afternoons to write letters, pouring with sweat. Sometimes, brief storms of torrential rain would fall, causing the rocks to change their hue. The only sight to disturb the sense of total quiet was the group of women spinning wool and gossiping by the sea. The sense of isolation and quiet, the exposure to nature and sense of being thrown back on his own resources, left Henry feeling queasy — almost a sense of vertigo from the hyper-

awareness of his own self and the world around him. It was a time, he felt, for great decision and self-evaluation.

It was December 19th 1939 before Miller wrote again in his notebook for Anaïs — this time from Athens. He had been traveling widely, as described in *Colossus of Maroussi*. He knew by now that he was obliged to return to America. Henry had accepted his fate and, at this remove, was neither “dismayed” nor “disheartened.” He felt “equal to it.” His attitude would change markedly as the reality of repatriation hit him at Boston. The terminal bookstand was piled high with copies of *Gone with the Wind* (“Why can’t you write a book like that?” his mother later asked). Henry had grown increasingly introspective. His instincts told him to shed possessions and to try his best to make peace with his emotional problems. The reality of seeing Betty Ryan again in New York and the knowledge they would never be together had weighed on him. He felt able to cope with anything — not just because of the overwhelming experience of Greece, but also the respite from sustained work for the first time in a decade. He realized now there was no separation between the physical and psychological. Henry had been reading about Yoga from three books given by a friend from Hydra.²⁸ Henry was fascinated and sought to apply what he had learned to his own life and problems. He now understood the importance of discipline and concentration and mused that:

Few are the writers who have mastered their craft like the Yogi master’s life. When it happens, we get something imperishable.

Henry recalled that he had often told Anaïs she should take a break from writing. Her diary was, by now, merely a kind of reflex or defense mechanism — a “*perpetuum mobile*.” He had stopped writing all together for a time, in Corfu. It gave him a sense of peace. When he took up his fountain pen (not the usual typewriter) again to write an essay about writing, it came effortlessly and perfectly. When he had said all he had to say, he stopped and refused to allow himself to get “wound-up” like a “clock” — which he saw as the usual state of the driven writer. It was better to work cyclically,

according to the rhythms of the body and unconscious. The ideal would be a state in which the writer is a dynamo, running steadily and then shutting off when he had expressed his fill. It was the opposite of running dry or ceasing to write from exhausting one's capabilities, or reservoir of strength or emotions. If a writer could emulate the Yogi, who knew how to "relax and how to replenish his energies," then there would be harmony within and between the writer and his work. He saw the compulsion to write at any cost at being behind the high level of breakdowns, alcoholism, and suicides; the failed careers through mediocre books, among so many writers. Henry believed that writers should examine, with honesty, why they actually wrote at all and if it actually brought them joy or merely suffering, dissatisfaction and discontent.

I feel now as though it were better never to write another line than to write with pain and effort. To become a sick man in order to produce a great and healthy work seems to me now a contradiction in essence.

What society called "normal" Miller perceived as "abnormal or sub-normal."

One always had to begin at the root, at the beginning, or risk being thrown back to begin all over again.

Greece had been instructive, as well as therapeutic and healing for Miller. He saw modern literature as dominated by "...analysis, criticism, dissection, proliferation...". What was lacking was "drama" in the most profound sense: a drama that encompassed, as ancient Greek theatre had, the most vital questions of human life and interaction and Man's relationships with nature and the divine. Henry believed that Anaïs suffered from a lack of patience, both in life and in her fiction:

...You can't bear to wait and see what course events will take — you rush to aid people whose predicament is the logical result of their whole life's behavior...you create illusory situations of well-being...you blind yourself as well as those you would aid.



Miller at Epidaurus, Greece November 1939

Once she ceased to intervene, everything fell apart. The remarks were disingenuous. She had done much for him and in doing so had probably saved his career, if not his life.

On December 31st 1939, Henry was at Delphi. His birthday gift for Anaïs had crossed Greece with him — including Epidaurus, Mycenae, Knossus, and Phaestos. He now found himself in the “supremely mystic spot of Greece.” It was a return to a “pre-Adamic world.” In his descriptions of the place, for Anaïs, he was already rehearsing *The Colossus of Maroussi*. The “great experience” began for Henry even earlier, in the landscape of the plain either side of Thebes. Here, everything suddenly seemed to become symbols of the universal. This was the perfect meeting of the civilized and savage, pagan and spiritual. The experience was so overwhelming that Henry became lost for words. He felt he had reached the place of “the god spirit in man triumphing.” The demand this put upon him, he felt, was to rise above everything mundane and worldly and “incarnate as a god.” Greece “demands the utmost of you.” It was like a mirror to the recesses of the soul — “the living mirror of the human spirit.”

On January 12th 1940, Miller was aboard the *Exchorda* one of the “Four Aces” of the American Export Line, sailing toward Boston. It was one of the last voyages of the ship, which was, later that year, transformed into the transport-attack craft USS *Harry Lee*. Eventually, it would be awarded seven battle stars and see service from North Africa and Guam to the Marshall Islands, Philippines and Iwo Jima, before being decommissioned, in 1946, at Henry’s old haunt, the Brooklyn Navy Yard. War was, most definitely, at hand.

What remained of Greece was the memory of the light of Attica —

...that light which I had never seen before, which I could not possibly imagine if I had not seen it with my own eyes...That light represents for me the consummation of my

own desires and experiences. I saw in it the flame of my own life consumed by the flame of the world.

In that light, he had experienced perfect harmony and silence:

...the highest experience I know of...a death that puts life to shame.²⁹

Henry Miller's birthday gift to Anaïs was an attempt, he believed, to illuminate her failings and shortcomings — both personally and in her writing. He also wanted to convey his discovery of a world far beyond the Paris experience they had shared. What greater gift could one offer than life-changing advice? What he saw perhaps as paternalistic or a sign of love, she would have found at best insensitive and presumptuous. She had given over nearly a decade of her life to providing for his every practical need and giving him enormous emotional support. Without her, as he later freely admitted, he would never have made it as a writer. Now that they were separated, his idea of a gift was to criticize her writing and her very self and to tell her how wonderful Greece was while she was racked with cares — at a time when she had seen her book stillborn. He was unable to understand how she would take his comments. It was as if he did not know her at all.

That Henry often believed Anaïs was her own worst enemy is not in doubt. In 1963, when discussing the publication of a projected book, *Letters to Anaïs Nin*,³⁰ with Robert MacGregor, an editor at New Directions, Henry wrote about Anaïs:

All her emotional disturbances are due, in my honest opinion, to the very complicated, multiple life she leads...I feel truly sorry for her, knowing all I do. Essentially, she is a big soul — but there is a flaw somewhere — and it will eventually be her undoing, I fear...*She's hurt*, that's all. And the hurt is her own doing, regrettably.

Although Anaïs had often allowed Henry to criticize her writing and help her improve her expression in English, by late 1939 she had reasons to balk at his suggestions — "I felt... cut off from

Henry because out of his egotism he can so easily make a new life." While Anaïs struggled, in London and Paris, to keep Henry and Gonzalo Moré afloat financially, her friends (like Moricand and Thurema Sokol) reassured and cared for, and her marriage to an increasingly distraught Hugo intact, Henry was (it seemed) having the time of his life. Anaïs knew this was the end of their love-affair and close collaboration as writers.

She spoke of:

Henry's weakness, cowardice. Given food he entrenches himself anywhere, hides, attains joy by detachment...From afar, Henry's self-centeredness looms more immense, without his human presence to blind or enchant me. *Je crois que c'est fini*.³¹

While Henry thought his letters and his birthday gift from Greece were enlightened and generous, Anaïs and Conrad Moricand were shocked by his egotism, selfishness and obliviousness to his friends' fates, and the impending horror of war:

Henry's way is not the way. He thinks he has reached Chinese-Tibetan equilibrium. But he has only reached a crystallization of the ego. Being blocked by pain and sorrow, he asserts the Ego's life as supreme...Detachment, objectivity, but with the wrong accent. Descriptions of his delectable meals, of his future pleasure, voyages, of new friends, of the stars...Henry exudes an animal warmth, an animal blood generosity, which seems like feeling, but in great crises is revealed as purest egotism. To end pain by indifference is not the mystical solution. No transmutation then, only an inhuman, impersonal anesthesia. Only I, Henry Miller, count. My belly is full. My wallet is full. The world is right.

She was not alone in her assessment. Some forty years later, Miller's daughter Barbara wrote, in a moment of disgust and despair, about her father:

This man demonstrates the most monstrous, uncaring, insensitivity to anyone that I have ever seen. Henry comes

first. Henry is all that matters to Henry. The rest of the world can die as long as Henry gets what Henry wants.

Back in 1939, Anaïs still felt responsible for his attitude:

...I am to blame for this. I nurtured this. I nourished this by my devotion, my constant, continuous care.

During his time in Greece, Miller had been writing to Betty Ryan, who is now almost erased by scholars from the record, and without whom he would probably have not even made the trip.³² She assumed they would be married upon his return to America. Betty even had to be persuaded not to join him on Corfu. Henry had already decided to discard her, which he did by flimsy pretext soon after his return to New York. Arguably, though yet unexplored, her contribution to Miller's writing could, unlikely as it sounds, ultimately be the most substantial after that of Anaïs Nin.

Miller was arguably in denial or oblivious to others for much of his time in Greece. He was, as he told Fraenkel, "terrified" of war and "as long as I have two legs to run with, I shall run from it."³³ He knew the cataclysm was imminent. As he wrote later, in *Colossus of Maroussi*:

This is one of the lowest moments in the history of the human race. There is no sign of hope on the horizon. The whole world is involved in slaughter and bloodshed. I repeat — I am not sad. Let the world have its bath of blood.

Greece was, Miller often implied, the most profound experience of his life. At times, he was overwhelmed by his feelings and at the changes he believed were happening within him. Alexandros Venetikos, who appears in *Colossus* as Kyrios Alexandros, later wrote to him, in 1957, remembering visit to Phaestos:

I will never forget, when you were taking leave, how you stopped on the veranda, near the steps, and gazed towards the sky in the east...and I knew you were admiring the works of almighty God.

But do you know, dear Honored Mr. Miller, about my tears after our leave taking... how, in my loneliness, this separation touched me deeply...thinking of how you were so moved by the creation of God's hand that you were unable to say goodbye to me.

And so, Honored Henry Miller, I never forgot you, nor shall I ever forget you in my life-time. I have only your book, although by now it is very worn, as it has passed through the hands of thousands of people, both ours and foreign visitors.

I have commended you to all my family ever since we met and have always talked about you and remembered your good name every day of my life.

While Henry Miller often left a profoundly good impression on people who knew him slightly, and could be generous to a fault, those who knew him better sometimes stared at his words and actions with disbelief at what they perceived as his overwhelming egotism and cruelty.

Miller had been planning a book on Greece from soon after his arrival. His birthday gift for Anaïs, letters to Betty Ryan and the notebook that he later published as *First Impressions of Greece* contained the germ of *Colossus of Maroussi*.³⁴ While Miller's journey to Greece was, as Bertrand Mathieu pointed out, undoubtedly Orphic — the *katabasis* and *palingenesis* that became part of his legend, the reality of Miller's "life-changing experience," as opposed to his mythologizing of it, was far from what he asserted — as later accounts by Brassai, Georges Robitaille or Judson Crews, as well as his treatment of Conrad Moricand in *Big Sur*,³⁵ attest.

Miller saw in Greece what he needed to see in order to cope with the realization he would have to return to America under conditions far from those that he had hoped. He was caught between the terror of war, which necessitated his flight from Europe, and subconscious fear at the demons, struggle and ostracism he faced back home. In Paris, Anaïs had taken care of his financial needs. She would probably no longer be able to do so. Henry had counted on income from Obelisk Press. The war and death of Kahane curtailed this. A literary community in France, both American and French,

accepted Henry. He was moving back to a country where his books were both banned and little known. He faced potential prosecution for what he wrote. In Paris, friends and admirers surrounded him. He was respected and the most successful Obelisk Press author. In contrast, he was distant from most of his old American friends. Distribution of his books was a criminal act. Jake Brussell was soon to be imprisoned for distributing the *Medusa Cancer* and other books. Henry's ex-wife, Beatrice, was ready to prosecute him for nearly fifteen years back child support. He risked running into June or his daughter Barbara whenever he walked the streets of New York. He had to face the family he had not seen in some ten years, ostensibly, from the American point of view, still poor and a failure.

Although Miller left France with barely a second glance and no regrets, it was not the same for Anaïs.

My bags were carried by a soldier whose shoes were too big for him. I suffered deeply from the wrench of separation. I felt every cell and cord which tied me to France snapping in me; the parting from a pattern of life I loved, from an atmosphere of rich, creative and human, from intimacy with a people and a city. I was parting from a rhythm rooted very deeply in me, from mysterious, enveloped nights...of sirens lamenting like foghorns on stormy nights at sea.

It seemed as if she would never be able to tear herself away from France. As her train sped on towards Portugal, on route for America:

Each mile of the journey, each landscape, each little station, each face, causes a painful separation.

She was forced to leave many volumes of her Diary behind in Paris. After sending money to Henry, she could not afford the excess baggage charge (she hid Miller's manuscripts with a friend in Louveciennes). She felt:

...despondent, ashamed to be saved from catastrophe, to abandon my friends to an unknown fate.

Anaïs missed Moricand terribly. He, she suddenly realized, reminded her of her father. She had left her first edition of Proust with Gonzalo to sell in case of need, while he awaited repatriation.

Anaïs arrived in America, via Bermuda, to a world of “overwhelming luxury”:

The softer the velvet box, the deeper the rugs, the warmer the rooms, the greater the abundance of food, the more I miss what I have lost, the lonelier I feel...

She felt she was “dying of homesickness” — and immediately fell ill. She was miserable and missed “my home, familiar streets, those I love and know so well.

Durrell’s last letter to Anaïs from Greece, in late summer, had confirmed her own impressions of Henry:

We left Henry. He is in a strange state, pitched in too high a key, a little hysterical with light and air, but physically fit as a drum. There is something deeply wrong with his attitude towards the world, but I cannot say what it is. He himself feels it and takes pains to justify his ‘egotism’ as you call it; perhaps if it were unconscious of itself, his egotism would become true detachment. In some inner way he refuses to grow...There is always that lovable myopia in him to everything except his own processes. And the war is too big a thing for him to swallow; he must reject it. He is enchanted by Greece... the air is so kind to him and the scenery so crystalline; but it has made him dumb. He cannot speak any more....

Durrell, uncertain about his employment and confronted with severe marital tensions, was profoundly worried about the future and, at times, despondent. News of preparations for war flooded in daily, by radio. His account contrasts sharply with Miller’s euphoric tone in *Colossus*:

For my part, I feel completely hopeless inside...We do not speak about the war here, but it is a kind of weight we carry

among us...the war eats into one slowly... Life is very black for us all — no hopes, no solutions in sight. Only there is a kind of imperative at the bottom of things, which tells me that we must bear out tears gracefully.

Sad and impotent, as Henry lapped up the sun, knowing he would be repatriated at worst (and could count on the aid of various allies, such as Ben Abramson and Frances Steloff), discussed Madame Blavatsky, ate good food, reflected on the indolence of Greek men (sic) and the bestiality of the Corfiot cats, and made new friends, Durrell finished each night with a bottle of retsina to help him sleep. At times, he hardly felt it was worth trying to write.

Anaïs made an extraordinary effort to begin her life anew in New York — helped by Frances Steloff at the Gotham Book Mart. She soon met with James Cooney of *The Phoenix*,³⁶ visited her brother, Joaquin, and began to make the rounds of those she knew vaguely, by letter, from Paris, such as Dorothy Norman. She felt sad and disoriented, unable to relate to those around her, but attended any party she could garner an invitation to (Caresse Crosby, Mabel Dodge Luhan etc.), just to ease her pain and in hopes of establishing some literary connections.

Henry arrived in New York on a day that Anaïs had the flu. Or pretended to. When she failed to meet the boat, he had to leave behind the gifts he had brought from Greece, because he could not pay the customs duty. It was not long before, confronted with his father's terminal cancer, "all of Henry's intoxication with Greece vanished."³⁷

For all his fine words about Greece, Henry Miller never returned there. He did not see Durrell again for some twenty years. Although he wrote sporadically to Seferis during the war, especially while writing *Colossus*, the only one of his Greek friends he ever saw again (once, briefly, in California, fifteen years later) was Katsimbalis. Once the book on Greece was written, he swiftly put the experience behind him. By 1945, Big Sur had, after Miller's frustrating stint in Hollywood, taken the place of Greece as his paradise on earth.

During his stay in Greece, Henry Miller, in addition to making notes for *Colossus of Maroussi*, wrote an essay for a *festschrift* for philosopher Hermann, Count Keyserling (with whom he had been in touch during his later years in Paris)³⁸ and composed "Reflections on Writing" for Huntington Cairns.³⁹ The latter essay allows us to compare the notes he made on writing in his birthday volume for Anaïs and the ideas he expounded in an essay destined for publication.

In "Reflections of Writing," Miller described writing as a "voyage of discovery... a metaphysical one...." He claimed to be writing the inexhaustible story of his own life — and not to have any goal — merely to be giving fragments, which convey "the feeling of the whole."⁴⁰ Miller said that he was becoming "more and more indifferent to my fate, as a writer, and more and more certain of my destiny as a man." Before he discovered his own unique voice, he claimed, there had been a conflict between the two. To fail as a writer was to fail as a man. The discovery of his individual mode of expression, after repeated failures, allowed him, he wrote, to unify himself. It was an experience he likened to that of Zen initiates. If Miller was truly indifferent to his fate as a writer, it is hard to imagine why he took such pains over the coming years to establish a defense of his work in a series of essays and personal alliances and to rally others to his cause. Writing always remained central to his identity. Acceptance of his books and his status within the canon were always to remain of vital importance to him. His certainty about his importance as a writer was far less than he implied, as the later accounts by Judson Crews and others and his much later canvassing of the Nobel reveal.

Henry continued:

I live in certitude, a certitude which is not dependent on proofs of faith. I live completely for myself, without the least egotism or selfishness. I am living out my share of life and thus abetting the scheme of things. I further the development, the enrichment, the evolution and devolution of the cosmos, every day in every way.

This kind of statement, combined with others he made over the next couple of years, gives a glimpse of the defense mechanisms he put in place against accusations of egotism and cruel indifference to others.

In everything he does, he is benefiting the world and, even though he lives solely for himself, he is, in no way, being selfish or egotistical. This remains a prime example of the inability to empathize Durrell spoke of in his letter to Anaïs. Henry wrote of his attitude as "sublime indifference." The implication was that his attitude was noble, and of high spiritual, moral and intellectual worth. His indifference to others and the fate of the world was merely part of his manifest destiny. At a period when most of those who had been closest to him in Paris were living times of fear, anxiety and profound insecurity, it is hard to imagine how he could have explained his attitude otherwise than in metaphysical, cosmological, terms.

The sometime confusion of Miller's thought during his stay in Greece is revealed by the passage in which he writes:

I am the equals sign, the spiritual counterpart to the sign Libra which was wedged into the original Zodiac by separating Virgo from Scorpio.

In his book for Anaïs, written in parallel with "Reflections on Writing," Henry castigated her for her alliance with Libra — a sign which he claimed represented a prison and *impasse* and a series of negative and destructive attributes — spanning the line between, Capricorn and Cancer, life and death.⁴¹ This passage was an unwitting admission that in order to flourish, as a writer and woman, Anaïs had to divorce herself irrevocably from a close relationship with Henry.⁴² If she followed the advice of the Henry Miller of "Heaven Beyond Heaven," she would abandon the diary, which he had written of elsewhere as a unique and metaphysical work, which had profound importance for our time. It was probably her masterpiece. She would also alter her written style, which he had elsewhere written of in enormously positive terms. One recalls a letter from Clichy, written in 1933:

When I try to think to whom it is that you are indebted for this style I am frustrated. I do not recall anyone to whom you bear the slightest resemblance.

What he chose to castigate her for in 1939 was the development of her own literary Voice — the very attribute that he had said was his

own salvation as a writer and man — and which had established his place in literary history. While, in “Heaven Beyond Heaven” he chided her lack of self-awareness, he had previously written that the Diary (which he had tried to publish and heavily promoted) was a creation in which “the ego... seems to completely disappear.” It was an “unfinished symphony”, with a “cosmic stance”, written in a “universal language.”

Henry claimed, from Greece, that he could just as easily not write as write. The truth was that he was written out. He could only tackle minor works — but his plans for larger scale books (*Colossus*, *Air-Conditioned Nightmare*) were fermenting beneath the surface.⁴³ Almost immediately after his arrival in New York, he began a period of sustained composition — including fiction, essays, and travelogue. He made extensive efforts to obtain commissions and get his work published. It was easy to be indifferent in Greece when Anaïs and Obelisk were providing him with cash and his friends were acting as generous hosts, but when he had to support himself in New York and save face in front of his dying father, money became a pressing issue.

To Miller, living out one’s destiny was primarily “making a life in accord with the deep-centered rhythm of the cosmos.” This included shunning “definitions, alibis, proofs, duties.” To accept this was “imperative”:

One can only go forward by going backward and then sideways and then up and then down. There is no progress: there is perpetual movement, displacement, which is circular, spiral, endless.

This comment illuminates the Spiral Form of Miller’s novels and links him to the spiral constructs of other major twentieth century writers, such as Proust, Nabokov (*Invitation to a Beheading*) and Joyce — as well as to a Hindu, Taoist and Buddhist world-view.⁴⁴ His rejection of progression is a rejection of the Judeo-Christian tradition, with its deferred paradise, and of political ideologies that believe in social progress, including Socialism and Communism. His attitude is simultaneously Individualist Anarchist and Buddhist. His belief is that paradise is here and now and “every road, if one continues far enough along it, leads to it.”

Miller stated that he did not hesitate to:

...invent, distort, deform, lie, inflate, exaggerate, confound and confuse...Often I put down things which I do not understand myself, secure in the knowledge that later they will become clear to me.

Anaïs, on the other hand, used many of the same literary devices, but in full knowledge of what she was doing. She wrote to create a version of the truth that she wished others to accept for her own protection and aggrandizement. The aim was to give an impression of her goodness and selflessness. Miller wrote that he used the truth:

...like a club, to shock them, to force them to come to terms with themselves and with reality.

He eventually came to consider Anaïs to be "an inveterate liar," who was:

...only concerned with what people would think or how they'd react if she told the whole truth about themselves. She spent untold hours cutting everything from her diaries that might raise a few eyebrows. She was preoccupied with creating an image that would make everyone love her and think only good things about her....⁴⁵

The dominant motivation of her character, Henry concluded, was:

...fear....The fear of seeing family and friends suffer or go without, the fear of being thought badly of, the fear of being unloved. She wanted to do the 'right' thing always. She wanted to be thought of as a good human being, an exemplary person...Lying and cheating were (also) the sacrifices she made in order to help others better their own lives.

He did, however, always recognize that "the debts I owe her are virtually un-repayable."

Part of Miller's argument with Anaïs' writing, implied in "Heaven Beyond Heaven" is due to his belief that "a man (or woman) is revealed in his style, the language which he has created

for himself." He saw her style as ego and fear driven — part of a pattern of intentional deceit that served very personal ends. It was almost pathologically apologetic. If Anaïs' writing was less than perfect, it was, she claimed, due to the difficulties involved in being multilingual. He sensed that once the veil of lies Anaïs had placed around her life was torn asunder, there would be little left for her admirers to hang on to unless they refused to face the truth. Henry freely admitted that at times she could be "...ruthless, even monstrous..." She would eventually be judged and dismissed by many — and fanatically defended by others, who would seek to justify her every act. Her writings would perhaps not ultimately have the strength to overcome the fascination with her personal life, lies and failings and the exaggerated claims of her fans.

Henry freely admitted that he did not understand many of the things he wrote. He was not concerned with "a piercing of the mystery, but an acceptance of it, a living blissfully with it, in it, through and by it." He had an ideal, which he knew he could not attain:

I would like my words to flow along in the same way that the world flows along, a serpentine movement through incalculable dimensions, axes, latitudes, climates, conditions.

Acceptance was the foundation of his belief system. In the acceptance of his failure and inability to conquer the mysteries of writing and the godhead, he claimed to have found peace.

He believed that:

Like the primal spirit of the universe, like the unshakeable Absolute, the One, the All, the creator, i.e., the artist, expresses himself though imperfection. It is the stuff of life, the very sign of livingness. One gets nearer to the heart of truth...in the measure in which he ceases to struggle, in the measure in which he abandons the will. The great writer is the very symbol of the non-perfect...the great work must inevitably be obscure, except to the very few, to those, who like the author himself are initiated into the mysteries."

It was in the need to express a vision of herself that was near perfection that Anaïs failed most markedly. As he later wrote, there

were many who came to accept her as “some kind of saint.” This notion is based on a refusal to accept who she really was — and the true nature of her work.

To Miller, art is:

...only a substitute, a symbol language, for something which can be seized directly. But for that to become possible man has to become thoroughly religious, not a believer, but a prime mover, a god in fact and deed...the trend is towards that blinding consciousness in which no present form of life can possibly flourish, not even art.

Miller knew there was a:

...Discrepancy between the truth of the matter and what one thinks, even about himself: but, it should be borne in mind that there exists an equal discrepancy between the judgment of another and that same truth...everything is illusive and more or less transparent... thus, in writing, even if my distortions and deformations be deliberate, they are not necessarily less near to the truth of things. One can be absolutely truthful and sincere even though admittedly the most outrageous liar. Fiction and invention are the very fabric of life...one adopts the lying mask in order to reveal the truth.

Miller's paradox is his ability to embrace his own lies and distortions and the condemnation of similar techniques in Anaïs' *Diary* and accounts of her life. The difference is one of intent, motivation and methodology. His distortions are religious and spiritual (and thereby universal) in intent. Hers are personal and limited to her own fear of abandonment, rejection, failure, and judgment. The benefit to others, potentially derived from her books, is almost accidental. It is based on false premises. When early feminists lauded Anaïs Nin, they heaped praise on someone they believed was an independent woman, not one emotionally and financially supported by two husbands. Anaïs' work is introspective, he implied, while Miller's is all-encompassing. While Henry embraces imperfection and failure, she cannot face it squarely. She seeks to reinvent the world in which she lives, the framework of criticism and Reality. Failure to accept

her personality and work is always due to the fault of the other or a failure to understand. Miller is interested in primarily perpetuation. He is confident that if he is misunderstood and rejected in the here-and-now, it is because he is ahead of his time. Eventually, he feels, except in moments of self-doubt brought on by depression, that his true intentions will be perceived. His books will be given their true worth. He does not fear the judgment of others.⁴⁶ Henry always believed that Anaïs' diary writing was harmful to her as an artist and served to kill her imagination. He told her she presented an "idealized me...the Christ in me." She freely admitted that when she immersed herself in the Diary, she could not write a book. She was always afraid that her fiction writing was not as good as the raw diary.

Henry Miller did not write novels in any conventional sense. He welcomed the anarchic trends in modern art and literature: "In an age marked by dissolution, liquidation seems to me a virtue, nay a moral imperative." In contrast to Anaïs, his writing was not "...an escape, a means of evading everyday reality." If "...the whole logic of the world is contained in daring..." and "whatever there be of progress in life comes not through adaptation but through daring, through obeying the blind urge..." then Anaïs' fear-driven writing, as published in her lifetime, was a dead end. It would ultimately be in the posthumous publication of uncensored works that the true importance of her diary could finally be appreciated.

When Miller spoke to Anaïs of her writing in 1939, it was still a given that publication of her diary should and would, circumstances and money permitting, soon be attempted. It did not begin to appear, in a heavily censored and rewritten form, until 1966. Henry's comments in "Heaven Beyond Heaven" pertain to her diary and early fiction and do not take account of the massive strides she would make in the coming years.

As the distance between them grew, Anaïs moved further away from Miller's influence and gained increasing confidence in her unique prose style. Speaking of *The Winter of Artifice*, she later told Felix Polak, "When I wrote this book I was too much under the influence of Henry Miller's writing and his revisions of my work."⁴⁷

Founding her own press in New York, she recast and rewrote *The Winter of Artifice* and published it herself, under the slightly changed title of *Winter of Artifice*, in 1942.

"Heaven Beyond Heaven" seems less harsh if one understands the depth of Miller's involvement with Anaïs' revisions of her unpublished work during the 1930s. He was, by nature, a demanding and vocal editor, who had not hesitated to take the axe to his own work. He had edited *Tropic of Cancer* down from nearly a thousand pages of disparate material. Some critics have seen Miller's comments on her unpublished work as "merciless."⁴⁸ Others, such as leading Nin authority Benjamin Franklin V, believe his influence was ultimately positive.⁴⁹ While Miller had arguably written his best work by 1941, Anaïs was still developing as a writer. Just as Miller had to discard early influences to realize his full potential, Anaïs had to emerge from Miller's shadow and find the confidence and ability to edit herself — and take her natural style to its highest level, which she did in *Cities of the Interior*.

To explain Miller's attitude to Paris, France and those he left behind when he headed to Greece, which so hurt Anaïs that she finally decided to break the closeness of their love affair definitively, one has to look at the deeper meaning behind his criticisms of her writing and his own developing world-view. Henry Miller had a profound interest in Oriental philosophies, especially Taoism, Zen and Hinduism, which he shared with Durrell and which they discussed in Paris and Greece and by letter.

In 1936, Miller wrote to Durrell about reading Lao Tse's *Tao Te Ching*, which a friend had recently given him (though he knew it long before). The book had an enormous influence on Henry. He stayed up one night until 4a.m. discussing it with Perlès. Miller had long been "nuts about China...I often feel that is the place I will eventually wind up in...I feel like a Chinaman very often."⁵⁰ *Black Spring* contained an extensive reverie about his life in Paris as China. Durrell responded enthusiastically, with a description of his Heraldic Universe. He had come to realize, like Miller, that the notion of duration (essential to the Judeo-Christian world-view) was "false" — "I am slowly, but very carefully and without conscious thought, destroying time." The emphasis was to be on inner struggle, not the outer. Miller had been exploring this ground intently, since the first page of *Tropic of Cancer*.

Durrell wrote of his Heraldic Universe as "...my own private element to swim about in" — thus forming the link between his writing, water and flow, and ultimately Taoism — "The Watercourse Way," — which found a fuller expression in *The Avignon Quintet* and *Smile in the Mind's Eye*. Miller had given a clue to his writing style in *The World of Lawrence*, which was, in 1939, still unpublished in its entirety:

When man becomes fully conscious of his powers, his role, his destiny, he is an artist and ceases to struggle with reality. *He becomes a traitor to the human race.* He creates war because he has become permanently out of step with the rest of humanity....He lives out his dream of Paradise. He transmutes his real experiences of life into spiritual equations. He scorns the ordinary alphabet, which yields at most only a grammar of thought, and adopts the symbol, the metaphor, the ideograph. *He writes Chinese.* He creates an impossible world out of an incomprehensible language, a lie that enslaves men.

Although Miller, in 1939, thought that *Capricorn* was his greatest work so far, he believed the most important was yet to come.

Upon reading *The Black Book* in manuscript, in 1937, Miller realized that Durrell had "crossed the equator." He was, like Miller himself in *Cancer*, undoubtedly, "an apocalyptic writer" whose text had been shaped by "the symbolic nature of the work."

Miller told Durrell that:

The theme is death and rebirth, the Dionysian theme which I predicted in the Lawrence book must be the theme for the writers to come — the only theme permissible or possible.

All is womb, hence you are constantly with God. Hence, like God...able to move creatively, easily, freely in all directions and all dimensions...You die out utterly, as you did in your book, in order to achieve a life on a thoroughly new plane of reality.

Miller wrote of Durrell as a Lama, looking down upon the world from Tibet.

At this point, the two writers had never met. Miller warned Durrell of that aspect of his character Durrell would allude to in his 1939 letters to Anaïs. Miller wrote about his Paris associates:

At bottom I haven't any intimate friends. I'm something of a monster, as you make yourself out to be in *The Black Book*. They never reach the inmost core of me, these people. They attach themselves and I act like a Chinaman — drop them when I've had enough and so on.⁵¹

On his megalomaniac days, Miller believed he might be "the next Dalai Lama," or that he might have "some Tibetan or Mongolian blood somewhere along the line."

In 1938, when Miller feared that war would soon be declared, he had fled Paris. Henry plunged into depression, so that by late September and early October 1938, writing to Durrell from Bordeaux and Marseilles, terrified of getting caught up in the conflict, he spoke of being:

...completely schizophrenic now. Change my mind from hour to hour, minute to minute. Nothing seems any good or worthwhile. Zero hour. I am completely eclipsed. I am sadder and blacker now than I was at 21...You can't imagine to what a low point I have sunk...if I were younger, I would commit suicide again. But, I am too old for that. I must live like a bedbug for a while — away from human society.

Events like this show the fragility of his equilibrium and sense of inner peace.

He dreamed again of going to Tibet:

If I could get to the Tibetan frontier, either side, if I could live somewhere there in the Himalayas, I haven't the slightest doubt that I would be content for the rest of my life.⁵²

War was averted by the Munich Accord, which Miller and Perlès (who was a Czech citizen) alluded to in *The Booster*. Already, in 1938, Henry had no hesitation in thinking of putting Paris and the Villa Seurat behind him. It was the discovery of Balzac's *Séraphita*

and *Louis Lambert*, soon after, together with his rewriting of *Capricorn* and his talks with Betty Ryan, that would crystallize his decision to leave Paris irrevocably and show him the direction for his future work. He visited the Maison Balzac, in Passy and spoke with the curator about Balzac and Swedenborg. She told Miller she knew immediately upon seeing him that he was a mystic. *Tropic of Capricorn* was, Henry wrote Durrell, in January 1939, strewn "...with metaphysical implications...." The "prophetic element" was, he asserted, "an essential part of me." Henry was soon busy, reading essays on Tibetan yoga by Bernard Bromage. They began to correspond. Bromage fostered Miller's interest in Milarepa — and his writing on Tibet, Miller wrote, "drives me wild, delirious with joy."

Henry went on:

All these great birds of Tibet remind me of the Zen masters, who are up my street. Zen is my idea of life absolutely, the closest thing to what I am unable to formulate in words. I am a Zen addict through and through....No intelligent person, no sensitive person, can help but be a Buddhist. It's clear as a bell to me...I am a Zen right here in Paris, and never felt so well, so lucid....

Among his favorite books of the moment were Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* and Alan Watt's *The Spirit of Zen*, which he heartily recommended Durrell read immediately. Count Keyserling had turned him on to the *I Ching*. Henry painted imaginary vistas of Tibet. "Everything is there in the Tao business...." Henry wrote, "Clear as a bell, says I. If you see the truth you cannot but help obey it. There are no two ways."

In *The Books in my Life* Miller wrote, "...as I have said repeatedly, whatever I read of Chinese literature (barring Confucius) seems as if written by my immediate ancestors." His fascination with China, Tibet, Zen and Tao are already abundantly present in *Cancer*, *Black Spring* and *The World of Lawrence*. In the latter book, he speaks of the acceptance that Anaïs (mistakenly, he would assert) called passivity. Henry affirms his realization that there is "never anything but the present":

Everything takes place in the present... The past is a word for something lost; the future for something unattained. Why do we ignore the present? Why do we strive to become something other than we are? It is because we do not realize that heaven is here and now. The mystic is the man who says that heaven is here and now. And knowing it, he acts upon it. With the mystic, the conflict is broken. He leaves the world exactly as he finds it. He wouldn't alter a blade of grass. He accepts the world, his time, his fellow man, himself...Everything nourishes him: pain, suffering, joy, wisdom, ignorance, war, peace, the past, the future, the present, all, *all*. He finds himself by a miracle at the dead center of the universe, in perfect accord, perfect equilibrium. He has no illusions about the world, about man...He asks for nothing beyond his grasp. He stops grasping and takes possession. Of himself. And when this happens, he possesses the world...you cannot dispossess him. He has created for himself a unique and permanent life outside of space and time...He represents the fullest flowering of the life force...He is the symbol of life because he has made the supreme identification with life.

Miller's identification with China and the Chinese puts him in the polar opposition to American ways of thinking and feeling and morality:

For us, China will always be that imaginary realm of non-being we have escaped...China, everything Chinese, is the extreme opposite of all that we feel, think, do, believe. Life there might as well be a lunar life, so far as we are concerned.

Miller spoke of the real China as being a land we do not attempt to understand. Our false image of China was simply a distortion made to flatter our vanity. China and the Chinese are associated, in the western mind, Miller implied, with death, passivity, godlessness, violence, cruelty, repression and lack of feeling. Its image, in the 1930s, could easily have been the land where people ate dogs and invented the horrific "death by a thousand cuts." The country itself was perceived as little more than "an eternal cadaver."

Miller believed we were living in an age of “fear of life” and “terror of reality.” It was a time where Man had lost religiosity — typified by Fraenkel’s soul-less living dead. A great schism had opened up within “civilized” Man, leading to a fear of insanity and of the power of language, war between the sexes, inability to live for the moment, and repression of sexuality and sensuality. The connection between human beings is tenuous and often illusory. The analyst is the new sage. God is dead. Paradise is always deferred. Materialism and base parodies of human connectivity offer the only succor to hopeless minds, racked and disoriented by a deep inner insecurity and terror. Straw men are our heroes. Loneliness is the norm. Our reality is virtual, not real. Life is barely ever lived in the present

Miller believed that in the modern age that the problem of God and of evil is the artist’s domain. The churches had already shown themselves to be corrupt and spiritually bankrupt — more interested in money and power than in the fate and suffering of humanity. The artist is, at times, both hero and a figure of vilification. He is the sole force capable of offering a solution for unifying Man. Through his own destruction and rebirth, he has a God-like importance. He is, at first, a modern day Christ figure, assuming the sins of humanity upon himself. Through the realization of his own self he then moves to another plane and becomes the personification of his unity — both as a man and with the cosmos.

In the first phase:

He must destroy everything and confuse everything in order that he can create, and he must create because there is no other solution to the conflict which has shaped him.

Truth is destructive — the only thing powerful enough to cut through “the lie of the world.” Miller believed that the modern age was an “absolutely new condition of life” in which the dominant expression was chaos. The future artists must be Orphic, Dionysian. The great transformation, for Miller, came one day in the Villa Seurat, with a vision of Madame Blavatsky. After this, he was changed. He claimed he now assumed responsibility for his own failings and own true nature and accepted both himself and the world as is. In this, he believed, lay the seed of his real liberation, a

new phase of life and creativity that led to *Tropic of Capricorn*, *Colossus of Maroussi*, and beyond.

Miller wrote that:

...the aim of life is to live and to live means to be aware, joyously, drunkenly, serenely, divinely, aware. In this state of God-like awareness, one sings; in this realm, the world exists as a poem. No why or wherefore, no direction, no goal, no striving, no evolving. Like the enigmatic Chinese, one is rapt by the ever-changing spectacle of passing phenomena. This is the sublime, the amoral state of the artist, he who lives only in the moment, the visionary moment of utter, far-seeing, lucidity. Such clear, icy sanity that it seems like madness.

Miller first heard the birth of this song at the opening of *Tropic of Cancer*. The fragmentation of the artist is due to his constantly changing awareness. His books are a series of births and deaths — part of a “spiritual progression” — until he realizes his own true nature and accepts the reality of life and the universe. “For the realized artist there is nothing but the present, the eternal here and now, the expanding infinite moment which is flame and song.” The only loyalty is to his “inner flame.” Everything else is merely fodder for his art.

From the late 1930s on, Miller gave the impression that he had no fear for the future, because he had learned to live in the present. He believed that if we were bitter and disillusioned there was something wrong with ourselves, not life or other people. “We create our fate every day that we live...most of the ills we suffer are directly traceable to our own behavior.” An acceptance of suffering as another fundamental component of life was essential. “The path to Heaven leads through Hell.” Artists were destined to be the new world leaders, to show the way forward. Paradise was not something for another existence. It was available here and now. Surrender and acceptance were the keys.

Henry Miller was at heart a born musician. Music was his first chosen vocation. When he turned to writing, music became an essential component of his writing — his song. He made a profound connection between music and Zen:

Music — you sound a note; that leads to the next note; one thing determines the next...And when you get down to it, philosophically, as in Zen, the idea is to live from moment to moment. This move decides the next step. You shouldn't be five steps ahead, only the very next one.

By living in the moment, one is able to lift oneself out of the "vicious cycle of life." Those artists who others might call heartless, were, Miller claimed, emancipated — because they accepted and were at one with the reality of life. If one did not put oneself in accord with life, then one would surely never find "salvation" elsewhere. Paradise must be of our own creation. We must learn to trust and accept *everything* in life. This sense of "peace and harmony can only be won by inner struggle."

By 1939, for several years, Anaïs had been writing in letters and her diary about what she considered Henry's almost pathological egotism, selfishness, passivity, and indifference to others. Describing their relationship, she wrote she was as much mother to him as a lover, if not more so. "If I am an artist, as you say I am," Henry once told her "then all I do is right."

Henry's perception of the artist as a God-like figure outside of all human conventions was one that was implicit in *Tropic of Cancer* and openly expressed in *The World of Lawrence*. In *The World of Lawrence*, he spoke of:

...the artist who, because he is an artist, will tolerate no other image but his own...*Treacherous at the core*...treacherous to everyone save himself. He owes allegiance to no-one.

"The man of genius..." Henry wrote, "...is a monster, a traitor and a criminal." He believed that "...the more abnormal he is — the more monstrous, the more criminal, the more fecundating is his spirit."

Henry's inability to empathize or connect with others had driven Anaïs to other men:

Henry again seems so dead to me, so inert, so passive, so plantlike mentally...I miss Huck (Otto Rank) terrifically to

talk to. This deadness of Henry pushed me towards Huck. Henry...can only write books and ruminate. He only came alive when I tortured him by leaving him.⁵³

She told Henry:

You have a whore complex... you forget other people have a complex about being used... You never understand what others feel who want you to like them for themselves and who feel you're merely using them.

He was, she told her diary:

Absolutely incapable of understanding other people...Oh my Henry! All your women have to be unfaithful, have to abandon you, because you are not a man, you are the child who sucks one's breasts until they bleed.... Henry sacrifices me to his every need. To live with him and to be dependent on him altogether would mean my death as an individual, an artist, a woman, everything...But, beyond a certain giving to Henry lies death.

Henry has not become a man. So, I find myself forced to continue to play the mother, because he is always the child... my conflict is that instinctively I still need Henry, but instinctively I don't trust him. I know he lives only for himself.⁵⁴

Later, she wrote:

Henry is possessed only by his ego — himself. And that will always hurt me.⁵⁵

Henry is inhuman — that is, for what he wants he will do anything, and what he wants is always for himself. He gives nothing; that is, he does not give himself.... Henry is Attila, conquering force, eating, warring, for himself, his ego.... He is contented with a flow of people who are not vital to him. He says any one of them could drop dead and he wouldn't

mind... our friends...we joked. Henry said, "we'll line them all up and shoot them."⁵⁶

Henry is not one who lives close to anyone, ever. He was always independent from his parents, his wives, never like Hugo or Rank, the kind that melts into the other...There is a hardness in Henry, a lack of attachment and love.⁵⁷

...Henry is not whole...he betrays everyone, even himself and God.... Henry destroys everything he loves, eats into it...he destroys, has to destroy, to eat.

Henry could not bear to be alone for long. He once told Anaïs, as recorded in her diary:

I don't want to go mad.... I want to accept and enjoy myself. I am not really happy, but I want to be happy so I take what I find and enjoy myself. You demand too much. I don't care...He is Chinese. If things go bad in France I go away...*Finito*. Escape. Above all, I don't believe in struggle...Talking about his friends, he makes this statement: 'The truth, the real truth, is that I have a lot of fiends who love me, but I love no-one. If only they knew how little I care! He appears to care. He gets soft, melting, sentimental. Everybody is taken in. He creates an illusion of warmth. But if any of them came with a real need, they would find out.'⁵⁸

That evening they were the dinner guests of Betty Ryan — the woman who inspired him to go to Greece, to whom he dedicated *Colossus of Maroussi*, and whom he led to believe he would one day marry. Henry told Anaïs, when they were alone, "If she stepped right out of the window and killed herself, I would not care."

Anaïs felt pity for Betty. She found Henry callous beyond words. He was "false and whorish." He, in turn, told her he wanted to "live like a mollusk." That night, she yearned again for Gonzalo.

Throughout late 1937, and through to early 1939, Anaïs' pain at Henry's behavior and words became, at times, much more acute. In October 1937, she wrote him a long letter about their "perverse" and "destructive" love and his "inhuman" behavior. She did not

send it. She pasted it into the Diary. At heart, she knew it was pointless. He would never understand.

Henry's obsession with China was again in resurgence:

Henry and I sit watching a film on China in which is revealed the great resignation, passivity, sense of the eternal...annihilating *personal* sorrows. I see Henry's attitude. His face is like theirs. It is their solution to life — resignation, acceptance, indifference.

His confidence, at times, was absolute. He bullied Anaïs about her writing, her life and her emotions.

He was:

Always talking about China and wisdom: 'I fight less' he says, after an evening during which he has said the most brutal, the most contrary, irrational, things to a young Englishwoman.⁵⁹

Their love-making, moreover, was rarely fulfilling: "Henry's caresses are impersonal. I become a woman, any woman — a cunt!"

At times, as she gazed into his eyes, the color of the sea, she felt as if she would melt, as if she could really touch him. But then, she would realize he was helpless, "bound like an animal." His steadiness of faith, his charm, made her question, for a moment, if he was wise after all, like some Tibetan Master. At other times, she felt he was a "schizophrenic maniac absent altogether, absent from daily life, whose every tear and cry is being transformed into diamond words." He was a "fevered monster" who "fucked impersonally, like a goat."

By March 1939, Henry had convinced himself that he had lived through a previous incarnation, in China.⁶⁰ He asked Anaïs to buy him raw ginger. He ate it with difficulty. He winced, but said he had to get to like it because it "was Chinese." He had begun to write books by hand for his friends. "Heaven Beyond Heaven" was one of them. She thought perhaps he was no longer the child — even though she continued to mother him. After intense days of work, he would retire to bed and expect Anaïs to minister to his every need.

Then, Henry's mood would swing. At such times, he was enraged, bitter and desperate:

Last night, he felt murderous, he rejoiced over Hitler's invasions and brutalities. He wishes France annihilated because the French publishers reject him. At such times, Henry the criminal appears; the blind autocrat who would murder whoever crosses him.⁶¹

His rage made Anaïs doubt mystical vocations altogether: "None of them seems voluntary. Most of them come by force of external pain and disillusion." They were, she concluded, part of a subconscious strategy not to go mad.

Henry, Anaïs wrote, "talks like a Buddha" but "could murder whoever opposes him." His greatest fears were of being trapped — or insanity.

Soon after, Henry was on route to Greece. His letters, while he traveled, she wrote, were "monuments of egotism." All he could think about was money, who might be a good touch, and making sure he was not left without an exit. He wrote that Anaïs should protect his manuscripts and notebooks at any cost. She should take them to America. Now that he was far away, the spell that his personal charm and masculinity cast on her was breaking. She remembered one day in the Villa Seurat when he had yelled at her because she had not washed his favorite cup for breakfast — and gave him the first that came to hand. Then she realized that the cup was special to him because made of thin bone china. It made him feel Chinese. She rushed to buy him an even finer one. Anaïs felt nostalgic when she saw Henry's paints and personal items, left on his desk for her to take care of, but there was none of the pain she felt at the idea of losing Gonzalo.

Many years later, during a reverie about Greece, Henry gave a clue to his relationships with women:

...whenever in my life I have gazed too long upon Beauty, particularly of the female, I have always experienced the sensation of fear. Fear and a touch of horror too.

Anaïs Nin raised this fear to a new level. Just as he saw her failings and traumas, she very clearly remarked his own. As with all the women in his life, there was a moment when the constant giving

and self-abasement became too much. She knew that if she were to save herself she must let him go. Anaïs had served her purpose. She had realized there would always be another woman to take up the baton.⁶²

Henry Miller's written statements about the nature of the artist show the close parallel he drew between artist and God. Like God, he is answerable to no one. His reasoning, actions and decisions should not be questioned, or necessarily understood. His only loyalty is to himself and his art. Those who help him and sacrifice for him do so of their own free will. They can expect nothing in return. The attitude behind *Tropic of Cancer* was, he once told Lionel Olay:

...stay alive as best you can, don't go down, don't be defeated, do anything and everything — like a criminal almost — to keep alive, to keep going; don't get morally defeated. Live like a bedbug, or cockroach if necessary.

By this attitude, he was able to survive in Paris and find his own voice, to create his first masterpiece. In the process, he discovered a new level of writing and expression, a mode of acceptance, that he believed paralleled Walt Whitman and the Transcendentalists. Miller's belief is that in doing so he lived out his destiny and helped innumerable people who later read his work. His benefit to humanity, through his work and life example, was enormous. Those, like Michael Fraenkel or Wambly Bald, who later became bitter and disillusioned because of the way he treated them, or because he used their ideas to enhance his own writing had no reason to be unhappy. If they could have forged success, they would have. It was not their destiny and they had no one to blame but themselves. The only people who could truly understand Miller's writing, he believed, were his peers.

Henry believed that:

...life is marvelous. We simply have not learned how to live, and therefore create our own misery. The moment we wake up, the moment we want it differently, we can have it that

way. I believe there is nothing greater than life. That's all there is. It's marvelous. But it isn't just beautiful. It's all things. It isn't just good or bad, one way or the other. It's everything. All at the same time.

Miller once told an interviewer that:

The greatest book in the world probably, in my opinion, is one of the smallest books ever written — the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu...what is greater, more wonderful, than that book?

From the mid-1940s to the end of his life, Henry Miller kept on his wall the photo of an unknown Chinese sage he had cut from a magazine, whose face, one reporter wrote, "bears an uncanny resemblance to his own." Miller once wrote: "I want to become nothing more than the China I already am...I am nothing if not Chinese." It was humor and the sense of life as a mystical game that also drew Miller to the Chinese. If the modern country of China had lost its way, it was due to the following of Confucius, whom Miller abhorred (and Ezra Pound venerated), instead of the real luminaries Lao Tzu and Chuang-Tzu. Henry had first read them and fallen in love with their work when he was around eighteen, though it took many years to fully understand and implement their teachings. He wrote that, especially after his journey to Greece and settling in Big Sur, he tried to model himself after the Chinese sages. He said:

I make no secret of the fact I have been much influenced by Taoistic writing...I'm at my best, I express myself best, when I'm following the philosophy of the East.

When Durrell called Henry Miller "the Happy Rock," the allusion was a Taoist one. Miller was the rock in the torrential stream of life. As Miller said; "the waves dashed, but they did not break me." It was "...the Zen thing, the philosophy of no philosophy, that helped me to habituate myself to accept the blows."

A closer examination of Henry Miller's personal behavior and work show the clear influence of Taoism. The Tao or Way has replaced any notion of a heaven in another dimension. Weakness, submission and cyclical motion are an intricate part of the pattern. Miller's love of Spengler ties in with the cyclical nature of a Taoist

understanding of the cosmos and human life. One must know contentment in the here and now and resist any danger by withdrawing from it. Desires should be minimal. Materialism was to be avoided. Conflict and contention must be renounced. Pacifism was to be accepted as the only path. Miller's passivity can be understood in the dictum: "The Way never acts, yet nothing is left undone." The Happy Rock echoes the description offered by the sage in the *Tao Te Ching*: "I am free from desire and the people of themselves become simple like the uncarved block."

Lao Tsu wrote in a time of great uncertainty and wars, as did Miller. A key that links *Tropic of Cancer* and the *Tao Te Ching* is the notion of the imperative of survival and perpetuation and the negation of time — the unqualified acceptance of the present and the rejection of all morality. Like the Taoist classics, Miller's writing focuses on experience rather than knowledge as the source of enlightenment. Many of his ideas in his later essays echo Chang Tzu's "Heaven and Earth and I were born at the same time, and all life and I are one." Miller's rejection of authority, traditional education and imposed order also echoes Taoist teaching. "Civilization" is in direct opposition to the natural way of Tao. Chang Tzu, like Miller, mocks authority and subverts society through humorous, provocative and satirical stories. They both have "a profound hatred of all that enslaves or controls the human spirit."⁶³

In Lao Tzu and Chang Tzu, we hear many of the ideas that Miller expressed in other terms, such as the abolition of the dichotomy between life and death, or earth and heaven. The mysterious female is central to creation. If Miller wants his words to flow and loves everything that flows, it is because Tao is the watercourse way and water is capable of penetrating any crevice and eroding any obstacle. It is verily "the fount of life." Miller's amoral stance is the epitome of Tao, in which all is relative. There are no absolutes and no external authorities. It is direct opposition to the teachings of Judaism and Christianity. Right and wrong, good and evil, sacred and obscene do not exist. In Tao, Arthur Waley wrote: "All opposite are blended, all contrasts harmonized." Miller's conception of language (as opposed to words) is also closely connected to the modes of expression developed in the Chinese language. The Chinese, because of the nature of their written language and its development, were obsessed (as was Miller) with

the “gulf that separates language from reality.” This could only lead to misunderstanding, violence, and conflict. This is a major aspect of Miller’s attempt to bridge the gulf between sexuality and the sacred in his work. Those who condemn him understand the words he uses, but not the language or the spiritual context behind them.

If Nin often saw Henry as a child, then perhaps she would have done well to note that closest to Tao is the infant.⁶⁴ There was nothing in Miller’s behavior in 1939 that should have surprised someone who had read *Tropic of Cancer*, or knew Henry as well as she did. If Anaïs wished to castigate Henry for his callousness and egotism then she had only herself to blame, as she soon realized. When he condemned her for portraying a sanitized, Christ-like, image of herself to the general public and hiding her true self, she could have easily remarked that the Henry Miller who sounded and acted like a Tibetan Lama or Chinese sage in his works was just as deceptive and self-serving. There were times, in the 1930s, when Henry had asked her forgiveness and felt guilt at the way he used her. Durrell remarked on the fact that there was something wrong with Henry’s attitude to the world and that his detachment did not seem a natural reaction to life. Perhaps, some wondered, it was more a pose or a justification of his “monstrous egotism” and inability to function in normal relationships, his disloyalty to friends and hatred of women, than reality. Henry Miller appeared a religious figure in his books, but his personal life and antics in Big Sur would have given many reasons to wonder. Both Blaise Cendrars and Conrad Moricand believed they saw straight through his claim to be enlightened (though the former, who sometimes treated Henry like a child, never told him directly). Henry was the man who, Anaïs later wrote, “never loved anyone more than himself, he would never die of a broken heart.” He spent the last decades of his life living in a gated community, surrounded by parasites, groupies and starlets — a wealthy man, followed about by films crews, worried about his taxes and whether he could canvass the Nobel Prize.

That Miller’s attraction to Zen and Taoism was closely linked to his own brand of Individualist Anarchism cannot be doubted. His early reading of E.P. Sinnett⁶⁵ and Max Stirner left profound effects that lasted all his life.⁶⁶ His shift from a political to

religious expression of anarchist views was a natural response to social developments in his time and his essentially religious nature. God was, after all, the “supreme egotist.”

By the time that Henry Miller wrote “The Heaven Beyond Heaven” the relationship between Anaïs Nin and himself was essentially over. They had nearly separated on various occasions and instinctively knew that departure from Paris meant a new phase of their lives. There was no longer a love to bind them. Both realized they no longer needed the other to be happy or to write. Henry’s later wives would fare no better than Anaïs. Eve wrote of him as “...thoughtless, unable to give of himself emotionally, stubborn, egocentric.”⁶⁷ Lepska felt “an absence of genuine affection and caring. He didn’t seem to see me as a person. I felt he didn’t really care, no matter what I did to please him...No matter what I did for him, Henry felt entitled....He was a helpless man with volatile emotions.” Echoes of June Mansfield’s “I was a slut for Henry until I realized he wasn’t worth it.”

Whether Henry Miller is perceived, in his daily life, as a Taoist sage or a profoundly tormented man hiding behind a mask, a “monstrous egotist” who was incapable of love, is a matter much more of the background and beliefs of the observer than of his actions. In his books, Miller gives us an embodiment of teachings that cannot be understood without reference to Taoism, Zen and the Hindu tradition. To judge him by Christian norms is ridiculous when he shared neither Christian faith nor *mores*. Part of the conflict in Miller’s life stems from his love of books and the fact they were essential to him, unlike any real Taoist. He was, at heart, as he once told an interviewer, also profoundly drawn to the Jewish tradition and way of thinking, and understanding through books.⁶⁸ In later life, Henry celebrated Jewish holidays, but not Christian ones. He felt a special affinity with Jews and always surrounded himself with them. Always part Oriental, part Jew, part American as he was, inner conflict was inevitable.

Henry Miller remained fascinated by China and the Chinese all his life. It was their humanness and sense of humor he claimed to admire — and their ability to endure, to persevere through anything. He drew a parallel between Chinese literature and his own. He, as they did, described experiences in his books and did not go in for “psychological analyses.” He, like them, tried to teach lessons about life using allegory, satire and opposition. He remembered his image

of China, from his childhood, as a country that had led the world in everything. The one sphere where he could not relate to China was their music. That, perhaps, should have told Henry something about the difference between him and the Chinese.

Henry Miller's real birthday gift to Anaïs Nin in 1939 was not a hand-written book or a new way of perceiving her life and work. It was rather the unequivocal confirmation that he was incapable of loving her or of empathizing with her — and that in departing for Greece alone, he had set her free to begin life anew without him. The reward was to be the confidence to write better than she ever had, freed from the shadow of his ever-demanding and all-consuming presence.

Suggested Further Reading

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Notes

¹I am grateful to the staff of The Morris Library, S.I.U. Carbondale, where the original is located, for making available documents used in writing this text and for their assistance during my visit.

²In Western astrology Anaïs was a Pisces, however, in Hindu (Sidereal) astrology she was an Aquarius. The difference is central to understanding the relationship between Miller and Nin, the text Miller wrote, their writing and relationship with Lawrence Durrell. The couple was profoundly influenced by Hindu tradition. They even exchanged Indian love rings, which Miller is wearing in the photo included in *Nearer the Moon*.

³Some were published. Others were destroyed or remain unavailable to scholars, in private collections. These texts include: *Order & Chaos Chez Hans Reichel* (Loujon Press 1966) written between December 1937 & February 1938; Book written for David Edgar (private collection, unpublished); Book written for Betty Ryan (destroyed by Ryan, along with Miller's letters, in 1940); *The Waters Reglitterized* (for Emil Schnellock, begun in bed, February 22nd 1939, published John Kiddis 1950, Capra Press 1973), and *First Impressions of Greece* (for George Seferis, inscribed November 1939, published by Capra Press 1973).

⁴An example of how Nin rewrote her diaries and misled biographers is provided by the fact that in *Nearer the Moon* in an entry dated February 27th, 1939, she spoke of "Henry, who wrote an entire little book by hand for my birthday..." when, in fact, Miller began the book on her birthday and then continued work on it periodically, until January 1940, when he was returning to New York, from Greece, aboard the *Exchorda*. Most all of it is written in Greece, where

he did not arrive until July 19th 1939. Miller and the Durrells had both hoped Anaïs might be able to join them in Greece.

⁵In both Theosophy and Hinduism a destination exists for the enlightened soul beyond heaven.

⁶Miller had been mooting a trip to America to write a book about his home country for at least three years. This eventually led to *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (New Directions 1945) and *Remember to Remember* (New Directions 1947), as well as *Our America* (with Abe Rattner Sunderland Arts Center 1976).

⁷See Karl Orend *The Brotherhood of Fool & Simpletons* (Alyscamps 2005) and *Henry Miller's Red Phoenix* (Alyscamps 2006).

⁸This would have been part of his planned, but unwritten, book *Draco & the Ecliptic*.

⁹See D.H. Lawrence *Sex, Literature & Censorship* Edited by Harry T. Moore Viking 1959. Essays against censorship by Lawrence and Miller were collected together in *Lawrence/Miller Pornography & Obscenity* Fridtjof-Karla Publications 1958.

¹⁰See *Henry Miller: Letter from Dijon* Edited, with various essays, by Karl Orend (Roger Jackson 2005).

¹¹Some of her early writings were collected in *Waste of Timelessness & Other Early Stories* Swallow Press 1977, 1993.

¹²John 1:1.

¹³"The chief concern of the diarist is not with the truth..." Henry Miller.

¹⁴Miller uses geographical and spatial imagery widely in his work — not just the geography of the Earth, but also the stars.

¹⁵Miller was much concerned at the time with his projected book *Draco & the Ecliptic*.

¹⁶See Roger Jackson *France & Her One Percent* (1998), p.18.

¹⁷"...The important thing to remember is that it was a woman, Anaïs Nin, by whom I was rescued and preserved and encouraged and inspired. Proportionally, France deserves about one percent of the credit."

¹⁸Nin, *Nearer the Moon* p. 256. So much for Robert Ferguson's assertion that *Cancer* and *Capricorn* were nicknames for June's tits!

¹⁹Although the force of the first person narrator leads some readers to believe Miller was writing a factual account, it is clear to anyone with a knowledge of the traditions in which he writes, or who reads his literary essays, that this is not so.

²⁰"To lie in a diary is the height of absurdity. One would have to be really insane to do that." Henry Miller in "Un Être Etoilique."

²¹This criticism should be compared to Miller's attitude in his 1933 letter to Nin regarding one of her books, reprinted in *Sunday After the War* (New Directions 1944), p. 269.

²²Miller appears in opposition to Proust here, because he speaks of the cultivation of the faculty of seeing the past at will. The difference is one of terminology, not fundamentals

²³See Durrell's *Prospero's Cell*.

²⁴Few copies of the book were sold. Critical reception was almost non-existent. Distribution was hindered by the death of her publisher, Jack Kahane and the advent of war. Miller had offered her advice and criticism during the various drafts of the manuscript. Miller had, as of August 6th, seen his first copies of the book, but not yet dipped into it. Anaïs, who saw the first copy of *Artifice* around July 16th, was still sending him money. On August 15th Miller wrote Anaïs that he had found a photo of her houseboat and was going to copy it in the book he was writing for her. Part of the book was edited to appear as if it were a letter and published in *Letters to Anaïs Nin*.

²⁵To Henry, spoken Greek sounded like "a loud whisper."

²⁶"In a way, the Artist is always acting against the time-destiny movement. He is always a-historical." Henry Miller.

²⁷When Miller moved to Paris in 1930 he had originally hoped to continue to Spain. On August 6th 1939 he wrote to Anaïs: "The spirit here seems very Spanish or Moorish to me."

²⁸The Greek painter Nikos Hatzikyriakos-Ghika.

²⁹This fragment from his notebook for Anaïs appears as a letter in *A Literate Passion*.

³⁰Eventually published as *Letters to Anaïs Nin* (Peter Owen 1965), edited by Gunther Stuhlman.

³¹September 23rd 1939. "Henry, who can leave a sinking ship without a backwards glance. In one day, he turned his back on France and all those he seemed to love so much."

³²Keeley's willful omission of Ryan from his account is unforgivable.

³³Miller was also terrified to descend into the well at Mycenae with Katsimbali or the Durrells.

³⁴The text on page 42 of the Village Press edition was revised to become the first page of *Colossus*.

³⁵See Orend, *The Brotherhood of Fools & Simpletons* (Alyscamps 2005).

³⁶ See Orend *Henry Miller's Red Phoenix* (Alyscamps 2006).

³⁷*The Diary of Anaïs Nin* volume III (HBJ 1969), p.26 and Keeley *passim*.

³⁸See Shifreen & Jackson C449 and Henry Miller "The Philosopher Who Philosophizes" for background.

³⁹Published in *Creative Writing* volume 1 November-December 1939.

⁴⁰This links back to the influence of Paul Valéry's *Monsieur Teste*.

⁴¹Miller says that he walks this line in his life and work.

⁴²Miller had told Betty Ryan that when "Anaïs is on her feet" they would be together. Ryan personal communication.

⁴³He spoke of his future books, while claiming he felt no compulsion to write.

⁴⁴See Orend, *The Brotherhood of Fools & Simpletons* *passim* for a discussion of these ideas.

⁴⁵Miller *Reflections* (Capra 1981), p.107. While Nin tried to give a positive impression of herself, Miller did the opposite — emphasizing or exaggerating the negative aspects of his behavior.

⁴⁶Miller to Durrell May 3rd 1937: "Entre nous, time will solve everything. The books will gradually make their own way, there's no doubt of that."

⁴⁷Anaïs Nin-Felix Polak *Arrows of Longing* (Swallow 1998), p.7.

⁴⁸Valery Harms in *Anaïs: An International Journal* volume 4 1986.

⁴⁹See Nin *The Winter of Artifice* (Sky Blue Press 2007) and Franklin's invaluable introduction.

⁵⁰On December 6th 1936, Miller wrote to Durrell "(I) want to be translated into Chinese above everything else." He was corresponding with several Chinese and Indian men of letters and had found an American who he hoped could translate his work into Chinese. His writing would appear in the *T'ien Hsai Monthly*, in Shanghai. It was from this city that pirate editions of *Cancer* and *Capricorn* were issued in 1939. Fraenkel had an extensive knowledge of China. He did a great deal of business there over many years and helped Miller make contacts for his work.

⁵¹This is evidenced by Miller's sometimes brutal treatment of Wambly Bald, Alfred Perlès, Michael Fraenkel, Walter Lowenfels, and Max and Conrad Moricand, among others.

⁵²"I am looking forward to walking the streets of Lhasa, unknown, unheralded, searching for a cheap cinema, or a 5 and 10 cent store."

Miller to Durrell December 1938. Durrell, of course, had been born within sight of Tibet and the Himalayas. "I was born in India. Went to school there — under the Himalayas. The most wonderful memories — a brief dream of Tibet until I was eleven...I think Tibet to me is what China is to you. I lived on the edge of it with a kind of nursery-rhyme happiness."

⁵³May 14th 1935.

⁵⁴December 12th 1935.

⁵⁵March 18th 1936.

⁵⁶March 1936.

⁵⁷April 1936.

⁵⁸February 1937.

⁵⁹November 26th 1937.

⁶⁰In *Reflections*, Miller said he did not believe in reincarnation, but there is plenty to suggest he did and most other points in his life.

⁶¹March 17th 1939.

⁶²Miller had told Betty Ryan, who was from a wealthy family, that he would leave Anaïs before he ever left for Greece.

⁶³Martin Palmer commentary in *The Book of Chang Tzu*.

⁶⁴"Those who have the true *te* are like a new-born baby." Lao Tzu.

⁶⁵Miller first discovered Lao Tzu and Chang Tzu through his readings of Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* and of Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East*.

⁶⁶See Orend *The Brotherhood of Fools & Simpletons passim*.

⁶⁷E.W. Fitzpatrick *Doing it with the Cosmos* (Xlibris 2001), p.127.

⁶⁸June once told Henry, "Go back to your books. It's the only way you understand anything."

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